

Recreation

Resource Description

The Fish Creek unit has considerable recreation potential once access is developed. The unit has fishing streams, a number of lakes, and the Iditarod trail. Adjacent lands are already used for recreation, and this use will increase once roads are constructed. The Nancy Lake Recreation Area, to the north, offers canoeing in its lake system as well as hunting fishing, hiking, snowmachining, cross country skiing on maintained trails, and public use cabins. The Little Susitna River, to the east, is a good fishing stream which is already receiving heavy use. It is also a good canoeing river which will become very popular when there is a good road to its lower stretches southeast of the Fish Creek unit. People also hunt along the river. The Susitna Flats Game Refuge to the south is used primarily for waterfowl and moose hunting as well as for snowmachining and cross-country skiing. Road access to the Fish Creek unit will also mean access to the Susitna River, just west of Fish Creek, either through Flathorn Lake or by a two mile extension of the road system. This will be a popular "put-in" point for boaters using the Susitna River and also Alexander Creek, the Yenta River, and Kroto Creek. There is also good hunting, primarily for moose, in the Susitna Corridor.

Iditarod Trail. Currently the Iditarod "race trail" follows a seismic line that cuts diagonally through the southwest portion of the Fish Creek unit just north of Flathorn Lake. This seismic line is used as the race trail for two reasons: 1) this route is completely cleared and offers a direct run from the Little Susitna River to Susitna Station and 2) prior to this plan, the actual historic route had not been located. Additional use of the Iditarod "race trail" is primarily recreational (i.e., ATV, snowmachine, and cross-country skiing).

Prior to the Fish Creek Management Plan there had been no real need for identification of the historic route through this area. However, due to the planned sale of a majority of lands within Fish Creek, the historic route was located by Joe Redington, Sr., in conjunction with the Division of Parks and the Division of Land and Water Management. The historic route begins in the southeast portion of the area and runs generally at a northwest diagonal to Susitna Station, intersecting Fish Creek and several tributaries and traversing major wetlands.

The historic Iditarod Trail includes within its corridor a cabin site referred to as "Burns' cabin," a deteriorating log cabin adjacent to a small man-made clearing.

Other trails. Seismic lines crisscross the entire project area, including one on the township line known as "the connecting trail". The main obstacles to using these seismic lines are the abrupt stream cuts along major creek drainages, but they provide year-round access by snowmachine and ATV. In addition, a tractor trail runs through the southern portion of the project area from the Little Susitna River to its termination at Flathorn Lake. The trail is usable in the winter by snowmachine and by ATV in the summer months, depending on the depth of streams. However, old fill used to provide access across streams has washed out, limiting access. Present use of these trails is mainly recreational.

Three other existing trails identified in the Willow Sub-Basin Plan are 1) Susitna Flats Trail, located in the Flathorn Lake vicinity; 2) Yohn Lake to Susitna River Trail, which runs north/south along the base of Moraine Ridge; and 3) the Nancy Lake Loop Trail, which branches off the Yohn Lake to Susitna River Trail in the northern portion of the project. Present use of these trails is minimal, as indicated by reconnaissance of the area during winter months. Summer use of the Yohn Lake to Susitna River Trail is minimal due to the fact that most of it traverses wetlands.

Fish Creek and other streams. Fish Creek and Homestead Creek are the two main drainages running diagonally from northeast to southwest through the project area into Flathorn Lake. These two major streams are in turn fed by the wetlands scattered throughout the project area. The streams have formed cuts to 50 feet in depth, with widths to several hundred feet. The streams vary in width from 900 feet (Fish Creek) and 650 feet (Homestead Creek) at their confluence with Flathorn Lake to two feet in the upper reaches; the width averages between three and ten feet except in the lower stretches of Fish and Homestead Creeks and in areas of beaver activity. Because the streams meander and contain numerous windfalls and sweepers, ice-free navigability is poor. Winter use of this stream network is limited due to dense alder growth though some use by snowmachines does occur. Other summer and fall activities such as fishing and hunting may occur but are unlikely at present because of the inaccessibility of the area.

Flathorn Lake. Located in the southwest portion of the project, Flathorn Lake provides good air access into the area. The lake is approximately six square miles, glacial silt in nature, and relatively shallow. It was formed as an oxbow of the Big Susitna River, which in heavy spring flooding, overflows its banks into Flathorn Lake. Numerous trade and manufacturing sites and homesteads are situated along the east side of the lake, where the higher bluffs are located. Fishing is poor in the lake itself; the lake does serve, however, as a congregation point for salmon spawning in the upper reaches of Fish Creek, Homestead Creek, and their tributaries, provides duck hunting in the fall, and also functions as a kickoff point for moose hunters. The lake is fed by Fish Creek, Homestead Creek, and an unnamed creek and drained by Fish Creek into the Big Susitna River. The lower reaches of Fish Creek are usually passable by boat and provide access from the Susitna River to Flathorn Lake. Views from Flathorn Lake encompass Mount Susitna to the west and the Alaska range to the north. Because the west side of the lake is periodically flooded by the Susitna River, only the east side has potential for development. The only uplands in public ownership at this

time are along the southeast portion of the lakeshore, in addition to an existing and a proposed public recreation site at the northern tip of the lake.

Redshirt Lake. Located in the northeastern tip of the project area, this lake totals approximately six square miles. It lies north/south, half in the Nancy Lake State Recreation area and half in the Fish Creek Management unit. The lake is entirely surrounded by private ownership. Its non-glacial, deep waters offer good fishing for resident pike and burbot, and provide a spawning area for anadromous fish.

Cow Lake. Located three-fourths of a mile south of Redshirt Lake, Cow Lake is approximately one square mile in size and is non-glacial. Ownership around the southern two-thirds of the lake is largely native, with the exception of one state-owned ten acre site classified public recreation on the southeast side. The main recreational use is sport fishing.

Delyndia Lake. Located in the northeastern portion of the study area, this lake is nearly one square mile in size, is non-glacial, and consists of two bays, the east and west bays. Land ownership around the lake is entirely private, with the exception of a public recreation site of approximately ten acres at the southern end. Sport fish species are burbot and rainbow trout.

Hock Lake. Located on the eastern side of the project area within Moraine Ridge, this lake is approximately one-half square mile in size. Land ownership around the lake is private except for one state-owned ten acre parcel on the east side of the lake that is classified Public Recreation. Hock Lake drains into the Little Susitna River via a small outlet at its southeastern end.

Historical/cultural resources. The Division of Parks has identified one archeological site located south of Redshirt Lake. This site is reported to have been an old Indian fish camp and village.

The "Burns' cabin" site is discussed under the Iditarod Trail.

The only other known structures in the project area are the remnants of an old homesteader's cabin and small smokehouse located along Fish Creek.

Resource Evaluation

The Iditarod Trail. The Iditarod race trail along the seismic line offers a cleared, direct route with adequate crossings along stream cutbanks. The historic Iditarod Trail route has only recently been located. A centerline survey has been completed. The condition of the historic trail for travel purposes is relatively poor at present, with windfalls being major obstacles in the narrow ten-to-twenty foot cleared corridor. This segment of the historic trail had been cleared in the 1940's. The use of the trail at present is minimal to none. The Iditarod Trailblazers have begun clearing the historic trail and hope to complete the clearing prior to the 1985 Iditarod Trail Dogsled Race.

The Willow Sub-Basin Plan determined that those portions of the Iditarod Trail in state and borough ownership will be protected by a public ownership corridor. The intent is to reserve and manage one trail through the study area. That is the historic trail, located and surveyed in 1983. Options defined for the corridor width were either 600 feet or less. The Willow Sub-Basin Plan allows a reduction in width only after consultation with the Division of Parks and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough trails committee.

Possibilities for sites that would remain in public ownership for access and use of the trail would be 1) at the junction of the primary road and the Iditarod Trail and 2) at trail and major stream intersections. The former (1) would insure pull-off areas for viewing of the race; the latter (2) would be oriented more towards camping in conjunction with use of the trail and/or Fish Creek and its tributaries.

Burns cabin. There are several management options for the Burns cabin: (1) stabilization; (2) reconstruction with adaptive reuse; (3) restoration; (4) reservation of the site and management for recreation or historic preservation (but no work on the cabin). The site has been designated a "level three" minimum management site by the Joint State-Federal Iditarod Trail Study. When compared with nearly 500 other historical sites along the Iditarod Trail System, the Burns' cabin site was not recommended for special management such as restoration, stabilization or development as an interpretative site.

Trails. Two land management options exist for seismic lines, tractor trails, and recreational trails. These are 1) public retention of these trails or 2) elimination of these trails in areas where adequate alternate access is provided by the Fish Creek road system. Retention would ensure that the trails are preserved in their present state but would result in an irregular land pattern. Integration of these trails into the proposed road system would provide for a more organized land pattern but may change the use opportunities these trails now provide.

Fish Creek and other streams. All streams within the project area have the potential for year-round recreational use. During periods of ice-free conditions, these corridors could be used for fishing, hiking, and camping. The lower three miles of Fish Creek is wide, lakelike, and extremely attractive. It could be used for canoeing and boating generally. Once the area has access, heavy use of the streams for fishing can be expected. During the fall, these drainages could offer hunting opportunities for waterfowl and moose. Winter use could include snowmachining, cross-country skiing, and camping.

Recreation sites at stream/primary road intersections. Projected uses at these sites are for parking on a day, overnight, or long-term basis to provide access for fishing, hunting, and other recreational uses.

Flathorn Lake. If the Fish Creek Unit's agricultural potential is realized, the likelihood of grain crops would very probably attract additional waterfowl into the area. Conceivably, the birds would use the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge during the day and feed in the fields in late afternoon and evening, a portion of them very likely using Flathorn Lake.

As both access and the agricultural area are developed, there will be an increasing demand on the fishing resources of the unit and that will eventually require the provision of facilities for both day and overnight use. Because of the seasonal flooding of Flathorn Lake and existing private ownership, feasible locations for public recreation sites exist only at its north and south ends. Of the existing state-owned public recreation site at the north end, only about five acres is useable. An adjacent site on borough land along the shoreline could be retained in public ownership, thus in effect expanding the site.

The potential recreation site at the south end of the lake includes more water frontage than does the site at the north end. In addition, deposits from Fish Creek have formed a small point of land at this location that could be used for launching boats. The site would likely prove inviting to hunters and fishermen and to people who would enjoy an unobstructed view of Mount Susitna to the west and Denali to the north. A public boat launch facility would provide access to the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge for waterfowl and big game hunting as well as hunting, fishing and trapping along the Big Susitna River.

Other lakes. Other lakes in the project area are almost completely surrounded by private ownership, with the exception of a ten acre site on Cow Lake, a ten acre site on Delyndia Lake, and a ten acre site on Hock Lake. These sites are classified as Public Recreation Lands. These sites could be used to provide various camping opportunities. Options would be 1) to develop access and camping facilities, or 2) to leave the parcels roadless and in their natural condition as undeveloped camp grounds.

Historical/cultural resources. Land management options for the historic village site south of Redshirt Lake range from its recognition and retention in public ownership to its integration into the total development of the area. Obviously, the most preferable option would be the retention of this site; however, at this point the extent of its historical significance has not been fully documented.